

ENGAGING PARENTS AT THE HEART OF CONFERENCE

Earlier this year I had the privilege of attending the Perth-based National Catholic Education Commission conference - ***Faith to Lead, Lead to Faith*** - as one of six Victorian Catholic School Parent Body (VCSPB) delegates. New to the VCSPB as parent representative for the Diocese of Ballarat, I particularly appreciated the chance to learn about issues of national significance for Catholic schools and where education is heading. As a Victorian, I also appreciated the brief respite from a bitter winter!

It was inspiring to sit among 1,300 delegates at the Perth Convention Centre, knowing that we all – educators, administrators, church leaders and parents alike – shared a common purpose of working collaboratively to enhance student learning, faith and wellbeing. Of particular interest to me was the area of engaging – specifically parent engagement in their children’s learning.



Like most parents, I am aware that I influence my children. Many a moment springs to mind, not all of them pleasant, when my children have echoed my words or behaviour. I have experienced the joy of helping my children learn to read, to tie a shoelace, to count to 100. And yet, as my children have progressed through school I have taken more of a back-seat role. Assuming education to be primarily the responsibility of teachers, I have slogged away at the ‘other stuff’ such as attempting to instil manners and responsibility for personal hygiene, learning to share, aiming for household chores to be completed without resorting to nagging or bribery.

So it was a revelation to learn of the body of evidence that demonstrates that parent engagement is one of the most important factors in education and developmental outcomes for children and young people. Schools that undertake effective parent engagement have seen large improvements in learning areas such as literacy and numeracy, and also children’s behaviour, including an increased enthusiasm for school.

Engaging in children’s learning is not about replacing the role of the teacher, nor does it require parents to be expert in every subject matter. It can be as simple as having a conversation at the dinner table, or showing an interest in what happens in the classroom.

The conference was a great opportunity to meet those working to equip both schools and parents with the tools to empower effective parent engagement.

The VCSPB is currently researching various organisations through a parent-connectedness project to develop effective strategies to engage and maintain connection with parents of Catholic school students. It is also engaged with Catholic School Parents’ Australia (CSPA) on a national research project (funded by the federal government) to ascertain what works in parental engagement and why, and to ensure that the views of parents across Australia are heard and acted upon. If parents have a view on a state or diocesan issue, I encourage them to raise it with the VCSPB so that together we can work with schools for the benefit of all young people. Contact 03 9267 4458 or secretary@vcspb.catholic.edu.au.